

I. TRAVAUX ET MÉMOIRES

a—Littérature et traductions anciennes

THE ‘EPIC’ REPRESENTATION OF ARMENIAN WOMEN OF THE FOURTH CENTURY*

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Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent; For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Tim. 2:11-14)

1. Introduction

One of the contemporary approaches to history, namely that it should be reread, deconstructed and basically rewritten in order to fully present previously silenced or censored perspectives, has allowed modern historians, without falling into the trap of relativism, to reinvigorate the field and provide a better understanding of our past and present.¹ Such an approach is imperative for the study of Armenian history, and, in particular, for the investigation of the role of women in Armenian history, for they have attracted little scholarly attention so far in comparison with

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¹ For an interesting discussion of the contemporary development of history as a discipline see, *inter alia*, Elizabeth Clark’s *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (2004).

other aspects of Armenian history and culture.² The surviving historical texts should be reread in an attempt to reveal and evaluate the representation of women's agency, experience, discourse and identity in order to build up a more complete image of early Christian Armenian society.³ This article aims at such a rereading of a cornerstone text in the study of Armenian society of the 4th century C. E. generally known as *P'awstosi Buzandac'woy Patmut'iwn Hayoc'* (The History of Armenia by Faustos of Buzand).⁴ By a close reading of the text, we shall analyse the valuable

² There are several thought-provoking studies that deal with Armenian women's agency, experience, discourse and identity: for instance, the role of women in Christianisation of Armenia has been investigated by Pogossian, Z. in "Women at the Beginning of Christianity in Armenia" (2003); the role of the Hrip'simian virgins in Christianisation is discussed in details in Calzolari, V. "Le sang des femmes et le plan de Dieu. Réflexions à partir de l'historiographie arménienne ancienne (V^e siècle ap. J.-C.)" (2010); on female ascetism, see Pogossian, Z. "Female Asceticism in Early Medieval Armenia" (2012); for Armenian women in different periods of history, see Mergeurian, B. and Renjilian-Burgy, J. eds. *Voices of Armenian Women* (2000), and Alishan, L. "Sacred Archetypes and the Armenian Woman" (1988-89); for legal issues concerning the status of women, especially in Middle Ages, see Mamyan, S. S. "Knoj Iravakan Pašpanut'yan Harc'ə Mijnadaryan Hay Iravunk'um" (1967); Barxudaryan, S. G. "Hay Knoj Iravakan Vičakə Mijin Darerum" (1966); Adoyan, A. G. "Haykakan Amusna-Əntanekan Haraberut'iwnnerə Mijnadaryan Orenk'nerum" (1965).

³ For various interpretations of these concepts in the context of feminist and poststructuralist scholarship, see Canning, pp. 368-84. Hereafter, by agency we shall refer to woman's own choice to either subvert the authority of masculine subjects ('subversive agency') or comply with it ('compliant agency'). This includes the socio-cultural factors that affect and, in most cases, determine woman's choice. Being closely related to, but not always dependent on women's agency, experience will be viewed as the conceptualisation of various events in which women subjects are physically and/or emotionally involved (cf. Canning, pp. 376-7). However, only male-generated discourse, as a tool for conceptualisation, has been preserved in early Christian Armenian literature. Therefore, the identity of female subjects can solely be established by reading beyond this ideologically charged discourse, and by reinterpreting every fragment of information about female experience.

⁴ In this article the English translation from classical Armenian by Nina Garsoian, as well as her introduction and appendices will be quoted (*The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand: (Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk')*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989 = *The Epic Histories* [when referred to in the text] = *EH* [when citation is provided]). The textual quotations follow the format 'Book:chapter' in Roman numbers, while for other parts of the book page numbers are used. Wherever the classical Armenian equivalent is provided, it is taken from the corresponding section of the 1889 Venice edition (*P'awstosi Buzandac'woy Patmut'iwn Hayoc'*: i Č'ors Dprut'iwns. 2nd ed. Venice: Tparan Srboyn Lazaroy, 1889 = *PBPH*). Garsoian's rendering of the title as *The Epic Histories* is based on observations by Step'an Malxasyanc' and supported by Anahit Perikhanian, who suggest that the word *buzand* in the Armenian title derives from the Parthian word **bozand*, Old Persian **bavant-zanda/*bavazanta/i*, which means "a recite of epic poems, a bard" (for more details and bibliography, see *EH* p. 14).

In order to understand fully the perspective from which women are presented in *The Epic Histories*, it is important to bear in mind that, according to Garsoian, they were most

information about the position of fourth-century Armenian women (as we shall see, predominantly of noble origin) in the society in the transitional period of the country's history characterised by a fierce clash between pagan norms and values, and recently adopted Christian ideology. This analysis will enable us to answer the following questions: 1) which women attract the fifth-century cleric's attention and what is their function in the narrative? 2) How does the compiler present and appraise his female protagonists' agency and experience? What are the criteria that influence his evaluations? Is the factor of gender one of them? 3) What is the overall image of women's position in the society that the compiler creates?

2. 'Moralise and Rouse'

Before we embark on analysing the representation of women in *The Epic Histories*⁵ a methodological remark should be made. Hayden White has suggested that "every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats."⁶ In her turn, Elizabeth Clark has observed that many early Christian authors received a classical education as a result of which they adopted for their purposes various rhetoric approaches of the Classical world: the most important one was "Cicero's prescription that the orator's task is to prove, to delight, and to rouse;" and in particular "rousing" became the most powerful means to be widely used in different types of religious texts.⁷ The influence of the Church Fathers, predominantly of those writing in Greek and Syriac, is indisputably present in the works of early Armenian authors, and a close reading of the text shows that the compiler of *The Epic Histories*

likely written in the 470s (*EH* p. 11), by "a cleric familiar with the Armenian version of the Basilian liturgy and deeply concerned with ecclesiastical affairs" (p. 15), probably "a native of the southwestern district of Tarōn because of his unreserved devotion to the Mamikonean lords of the district and to its holy site of Aštišat, which he invariably presents as the original center of Armenian Christianity" (p. 16). In addition, the views expressed by the compiler "reflect the manners and values of an aristocratic and military society" (p. 32).

⁵ It should be clarified at this point that throughout the article reference will be made to the collection of histories as a whole. Although the histories, which deal with historical events attested by other sources, were originally transmitted orally by *gusans* (bards), the work that we possess now is their *re-presentation* through the ideological prism of a Christian cleric. Thus, we will discuss *The Epic Histories* as a work rewritten by a religious person rather than composed by *gusans*.

⁶ White, p. 14.

⁷ Clark, "1990 Presidential Address" pp. 222-3.

is not an exception. He clearly aims at both ‘moralizing’ the events he describes and ‘rousing’ people to action.⁸ Therefore, we shall attempt to read beyond the compiler’s complex discourse and comment, where possible, on its implications.

3. *Naxarar Armenia and the Concept of *Awrēnk*’*

The perspectives through which the stories are told and the standards according to which people and their actions are appraised uncover not only the personal attitude of the author but also, if not predominantly, that of the Armenian nobility. Although the depiction of women does not occupy a central position in the histories, the way women are presented does reveal the “constant social patterns and virtues and eternal verities”⁹ through which the patriarchal society defined the limits of women’s agency and experience, as well as created, endorsed and exalted socially approved role models. The study of these role models and socially approved norms will enable us to answer the questions posed in the introductory paragraph.

There is no doubt that fourth-century Armenian society,¹⁰ with which *The Epic Histories* are preoccupied, operated on the principles of patriarchy. Political and ecclesiastical power was distributed among the male members of society: the *naxarars* (magnates) were in full control of their ancestral lands and the king was merely *primus inter pares*.¹¹ The *naxarar* system was based on the institution of the extended family called *tun* or (*azga*)*tohm*, in which a rigid hierarchy was established. The head of the

⁸ Indeed, *The Epic Histories* repeatedly reinforces the indisputable hereditary rights of the Gregorid bishops to the see of the Armenian patriarchate and glorifies the manifestation of Christian ideology, which by the time of compilation had already become a very important constituent of Armenian identity. Furthermore, no opportunity is missed to demonstrate the valour of the Mamikonean *sparapets* with their incontestable dedication to Church and nation. The inspiring homilies pronounced by religious men (e.g. *EH* IV:xv; V:xxviii) and the enumeration of victorious battles of the Armenian army under the leadership of the Mamikonean *sparapets* (IV:xxv-xliii, IV:xlv-xlix) serve to identify the essence of the true faith and to define self-sacrificing loyalty to ancestral customs as opposed to the inconsistent and destructive policy of many Arsacid (*Arm. Aršakuni*) kings. These are the most important “constant social patterns and virtues and eternal verities” with which, as Garsoian observes, “the epic and ecclesiastical world of *The Epic Histories* was primarily concerned” (*EH* pp. 40-1). The “moralizing” aspect of the work thus becomes appreciable.

⁹ See n. 8.

¹⁰ *The Epic Histories* recount events primarily concerning the Arsacid kingdom of Greater Armenia, therefore in this article ‘Armenia’ refers to that kingdom.

¹¹ Adontz, pp. 183-251, 286-8.

tun, usually its senior member, was called *tēr*, *tanutēr* or *nahapet*. He was responsible for providing cavalry to the king and for the management of the family's inalienable property.¹² Likewise, his wife, the *tantikin*, was in charge of the house and allocated tasks among other female members of the household.¹³ In general, there was a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities in *naxarar* society, and women were most likely assigned various roles within the confines of the house, for very rarely in early Armenian texts do we observe a woman outside these boundaries, especially without being accompanied by a man.

This *status quo* was maintained through abiding by a number of unwritten, orally transmitted rules, norms and habits, to which the compiler of *The Epic Histories* often refers. Jean-Pierre Mahé¹⁴ and Aram Mardirossian¹⁵ identify this phenomenon with the customary law, which was expressed by the word *awrēnk'* in the works of early Christian Armenian authors. The concept of *awrēnk'* represented a combination of elements of the customary law and of Christian principles, a set of norms which was to be preserved in the collective consciousness as *hayreni* [*astuacatur*] *awrēnk'* (Հայրենի [աստուածաւոր] օրէնք) — [god-given] ancestral laws (lit. of the fathers).¹⁶ As Robert Thomson underscores, *awrēnk'* “embraces more than religion to include customs, laws, and traditions, a whole way of life that characterized Armenians as Armenians.”¹⁷ The whole complexity of the concept *awrēnk'* is reflected in *The Epic Histories*, and as we shall see in the subsequent discussion, it is through the prism of *awrēnk'* that the main female characters of *The Epic Histories* are judged.

The roots of Armenian customary law may be traced back to the Indo-European and Hurro-Urartian heritage of the Armenian people but its formation, being a long process, also bore discernible traces of Iranian influence.¹⁸ In the religious sphere, Zoroastrianism became an important

¹² *EH* p. 563.

¹³ Mahé, p. 690.

¹⁴ Mahé, pp. 683-9.

¹⁵ Mardirossian, pp. 25-8.

¹⁶ See Elišč, p. 191; or in Movsēs Xorenac'i — “սրով կատարեցան արիաբար ի վերայ Հայրենի օրինացն” (II:9); “they [the two sons of Bagrat] courageously perished by the sword for their ancestral *awrēnk'*” (my translation).

¹⁷ Thomson, p. 10.

¹⁸ Garsoian has identified and analysed many elements of Iranian culture shared by the representatives of Armenian nobility: see *inter alia* “Prolegomena to a Study of the Iranian Elements in Arsacid Armenia,” “The Iranian Substratum of the ‘Agat’angelos’ Cycle” and “The Locus of the Death of Kings: Iranian Armenia — the Inverted Image” all in

product of Iranian culture that found fertile ground in Armenia, and it had a long-lasting effect on Armenian way of life and mentality.¹⁹ One such effect is most likely the assimilation of the Zoroastrian tenet of ethical dualism found in all varieties of Zoroastrianism.²⁰ Its roots seem to lie in the older Indo-Iranian tradition, and in the Avesta it is presented as “a struggle between the right, *aša*, and the false, *drug*.²¹ The meaning of *aša* is very close to Armenian *awrēnk'*, for *aša*, as interpreted by various scholars, signifies “truth,” “order” and/or “righteousness.”²² *Aša* is one of the seven Zoroastrian *Amāša Spāntas* (“Bounteous Immortals”), which “represent the totality of good moral qualities,” namely “wisdom,” “truth,” “good thinking,” “dominion,” “devotion,” “life,” “wholeness” and “obedience.”²³ These are the qualities which a good Zoroastrian, regardless of sex, ought to strive for in their everyday life. In *The Epic Histories* ethical dualism is expressed through the evaluation of people’s actions as either praiseworthy or iniquitous; likewise, people themselves are characterised as either righteous or unrighteous. There seems to be no in-between state: as P’arānjem’s case shows, the compiler does not find words suitable for the appraisal of the brave, “righteous” deed of the previously “unrighteous” queen.²⁴

Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians (1985). Mahé’s remark on the administrative vocabulary of Armenian borrowed from Parthian and Middle Persian is also noteworthy: “[L]’influence iranienne est absolument certaine, comme le montrent les nombreux emprunts de l’arménien classique au parthe ou au moyen-persan, dans le domaine du droit et des institutions. Pour ne citer que les exemples les plus simples, *awrēn* ‘loi’, *hraman* ‘commandement’, *hrovartak* ‘décret’, *muṛhak* ‘document scellé’, *uxt* ‘pacte, alliance’, *vkay* ‘témoin’, sont emprunts au parthe durant la période précédant l’avènement des Sassanides. De même *dat* ‘jugement’, *diwan* ‘archives’, *namak* ‘lettre, charte’, *payman* ‘condition’, *včir* ‘sentence’ sont emprunts au moyen-persan sans doute entre 224 et l’invention de l’alphabet arménien.” (pp. 683-4).

¹⁹ Russell has identified many instances of Zoroastrian concepts preserved in Armenian: e.g., *Anahtakan atbiwr* — the Spring of Anahit, the Armenian name of a fountain on the slopes of Mount Ararat (p. 250); *sandaramet-k'* — “Hades or the underworld,” from the name of the Avestan goddess *Spēnta Armaiti* (pp. 323-5); *draxt* (paradise) — *džoxk'* (hell) (pp. 340-1); *parķ'* — *x'arēnah-* (glory), *baxt* (fortune) (pp. 347-8).

²⁰ Admittedly, the opposition of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ was a universal concept and not the invention of Indo-Iranian people. Nevertheless, with the spread of Zoroastrianism, this ontological opposition was enacted in everyday practices, religious rituals and festivities, and it became an important element of lifestyle for all Zoroastrians (including Armenians), who had the moral obligation to support the spirits of light against the assaults of evil powers in lieu of merely recognising the existence of these two opposing concepts (cf. Boyce *A History of Zoroastrianism*. Vol. 1. (= HZ I), p. 220).

²¹ HZ I p. 198.

²² Schlerath and Skjærvø.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ See the discussion below.

Another element of ancient culture which Zoroastrianism perpetuated was the veneration of the life-giving ability of women. The Great Mother goddess, whose worship is also attested in Armenia through the cult of the Sumero-Akkadian goddess Nana (Nanaia, *Arm. Nanē*), lent some of her characteristics to the Zoroastrian deity Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā (*Arm. Anahit*).²⁵ While reverence of female goddesses does not imply that the social position of mortal women was also elevated,²⁶ most scholars agree that “[i]n general women have a dignified position in the Zoroastrian community, as men’s partners in the common struggle against evil, and this appears due to Zoroaster’s own teachings.”²⁷ Nevertheless, only in the sphere of moral conduct based on religious tenets did women enjoy equal opportunities with men, whereas in the social dimension such equality was not conceivable.²⁸

Early Armenian historical texts, *The Epic Histories* not being an exception, contain many examples of dualistic thinking when events, actions and phenomena are evaluated in relation to the categories of “righteousness” and “unrighteousness,” and there are a number of episodes when women are extolled and elevated for adhering to “righteousness” and condemned for failing to do so. The subsequent analysis will thus enable us to understand some of the criteria applied by the anonymous compiler for the appraisal of women’s agency; we shall see how a cleric writing for the representatives of the upper class presents and defines *awrēnk'* with regard to women, and what aspects of female behaviour he considers “righteous” and worth being emulated. Nevertheless, attributing the appraisal of female agency to the prejudices and limitations of the male-centred ideological framework of the *naxarar* system should be avoided. In many cases the criteria of *awrēnk'* applied to women reflected universal values which were applicable to both men and women. In addition, we should bear in mind the fact that in the period when *The Epic Histories* were compiled, Armenian society was still in a transitional phase of changing the pagan world outlook to a Christian one, which meant that the concept of *awrēnk'* was also subject to redefinition.²⁹

²⁵ See Russell, pp. 235-60.

²⁶ Cf. Lerner, p. 29.

²⁷ *HZ I* p. 308 n. 83. For a similar view, see de Jong, pp. 23-4.

²⁸ de Jong, p. 23.

²⁹ The ideological tensions within the Armenian society, in the centre of which was the clash between “*hayreni [astvacatur] awrēnk'*” (see n. 16) and “*awrēnk' moguc'n*” (“the law of the magi” (Elišē, p. 7)), are clearly reflected in the fifth-century histories of the Armenian revolt against Yazdegerd II by Elišē and Lazar P’arpec’i.

4. Female Protagonists of *The Epic Histories*

As far as women are concerned, the first striking feature of the narrative is the scarcity of references to them: it is a world where men rule, fight, betray, change allegiances, preach, are exiled, suffer, cure, wreak miracles and so forth. In other words, men are endowed with multifaceted agency: they are provided with authoritative discourse and power to determine people's future, and they dominate all the important spheres of life. They have a voice which is clearly heard through their speeches, a voice that the author grants them. At the same time, we glimpse women who, with very few exceptions, are silent, and most of them show full compliance with patriarchal rules. Their function in the story is primarily to be there as objects manipulated by men: for instance, they are given in an arranged marriage to secure certain benefits for their family,³⁰ or they are bodies to be punished for the deeds of their closest male relatives.³¹

Representatives of different social groups, both men and women, attract the author's attention, but the main focus is on the nobility. Alongside various queens and princesses of Armenian, Greek and Persian origins, lay and “marginalised” women are also portrayed in the collection but they only play a functional role in the completion of the image which the author is attempting to create. Thus, in order to recount the “unrighteous” and “impious” deeds of patriarch Yusik's sons Pap and At'anigenēs, the author depicts them drinking wine with harlots and singing girls;³² or, we observe Queen P'arānjem isolated, abandoned and unprotected in the company of only two serving-women after the divine punishment has been inflicted upon her companions in the fortress of Artagers;³³ furthermore, to introduce a common hagiographic *topos*, when a martyr's bones

³⁰ *EH* III:ix; IV:1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, IV:lviii; IV:lix.

³² “Երթեալք երկորին եղբարքն [Պապն եւ Աթանակնէս] մտանէին յեպիսկոպոսանոցն՝ որ էրն անդ. եւ ըմպէին անդ զինի բողօք և վարձակօք եւ գուսանօք եւ կասակօք. զոտրք եւ լնովիրեալ տեղօքիք քածակեալ կոխան առնէին” (*PBPH* Գ:Ժթ); “entering into the bishop's-residence which was there, the two brothers [Pap and At'anagenēs] drank wine in it together with harlots, singing girls, *gusans*, and buffoons, scorning the holy and consecrated place and trampling it underfoot” (*EH* III:xix).

³³ “Եւ եղեւ յես չորեքսասներորդ ամսեանն Հարուածոց՝ որ յԱստուածոյ Հասին՝ ի մերայ զաղթականին բերնորդեացն. զի մաշ անկաւ ՚ի վերայ նոցա՝ որք ՚ի բերդին էին, զի ՚ի տեսանն Հասին պատուասք … զի էին արք իրբեւ մնասան Հազար, եւ կանայք իրբեւ վեց Հազար. զի ամիս մի ոչ կացին, զի ամենեքեան՝ որ էին ՚ի բերդին՝ առ Հասարակ սասակեցան … մնաց ՚ի բերդին Փառանձեմ տիկին, երկու նաշշաօք” (*PBPH* Գ:ԺԵ); “And after the fourteenth month divine blows fell upon the refugees within the fortress. Death came down upon those who were in the fortress as a punishment from the Lord. [...] [For there were] some eleven thousand men and six thousand women. Not even a month had passed, when

become objects of veneration, Hamazaspuihi's nurse³⁴ is depicted to be collecting her lady's bones after her martyric death. The harlots, the singing girls and the nurse, being secondary characters that belong to the lower strata of society, remain unnamed. Only the mention of their occupations reveals some of the roles they could assume in that society, but this scant evidence does not render it possible to reconstruct, at least partially, their agency, experience or identity.

There are only three women of noble origin whose deeds were deemed important enough to be included and discussed at length in *The Epic Histories*: Queen P'arānjem, Hamazaspuihi Mamikonean and Queen Zarmanduxt are the three female figures who demonstrate agency under specific conditions. Their agency and representation, however, are dissimilar: while P'arānjem's depiction is undoubtedly ambiguous, with both positive and negative evaluations of her character and deeds, Hamazaspuihi and Zarmanduxt are pictured as unequivocally positive characters compliant with tenets of *awrēnk*.

4.1 *P'arānjem*

We first meet P'arānjem in *Book IV* (chapter xv), where the author introduces this daughter of Andovk, the *nahapet* of Siwnik³⁵, as a “beautiful” maiden “renowned for her beauty and her modesty;”³⁵ word of her

all those in the fortress had been killed. [...] Queen P'arānjem remained [alone] in the fortress with two serving-women” (*EH* IV:lv).

³⁴ “Յայս տեսիլ տիկնոջն Համազասպուհեայ՝ էսո կին մի զայեակն նորին ... եւ կայր առ բարձր զաշուն քարին՝ ի ներքոյ աշտարակին՝ զործ կախեալ էր զասնն իւր, մինչեւ կողոպահեաւ ամենան մարմինքն զիցն: Եւ որչափ ի վայր վայրէին ոսկերքն, նա յիւր ծոցն ժողովէր բոյանակ զամենայի զուկերս սանին. Եւ առեալ զնաց յիւրսն” (*PBRH* Դ:ծթ); “Beholding the sight of the lady Hamazaspuihi, a woman, her nurse [...] stood at the rocky height, below the tower from which her nursling was hanging, until all the flesh was stripped from her body. And as the bones happened to fall down, she gathered up into her bosom all the bones of her nursling, and taking them she went to her own [kinsmen]” (*EH* IV:lix).

³⁵ “Զայտո ժամանակաւ էր գուստը մի գեղեցիկ Անդրսկայ ուրումն, մի ՚ի նախարարացն նաշագետին Սիւնեաց, որում անուն Փատանձեն կոչէր. զործէ կարի անուանեալ էր գեղեցկոթեածը եւ պարկէշտոթեածը” (*PBRH* Դ:ժԵ); “Around that time Andovk, one of the *naharars* of the *nahapet* of Siwnik³⁵, had a beautiful daughter named P'arānjem who was greatly renowned for her beauty and her modesty” (*EH* IV:xv). *Պարկէշտոթին* can be translated as ‘modesty,’ ‘chastity,’ or ‘decency’ and it is not clear to which characteristic the compiler refers; Garsoian has chosen “modesty.” It should be mentioned that Agathangelos (*Arm. Agat'angelos*) in the history of Armenia's conversion to Christianity uses various derivatives of *պարկէշտ* — for instance, *պարկէշտական* (§ 138), *պարկէշտագեղ* (§ 139) *պարկէշտամէր* (§ 143) and *պարկէշտոթին* (§ 162) — in his description of the virtues of holy Hripsimian virgins.

“loveliness spread about, and the renown of her beauty grew, increased, and resounded.”³⁶ Many a man desires her and that becomes the reason for the death of her husband Gnel. Tirit^c, Gnel’s cousin,³⁷ filled with passion for P^caranjem, slanders him before King Aršak, and the latter gives the orders to murder Gnel. When she sees Gnel “seized and bound,”³⁸ P^caranjem seeks help in the church where the great chief-bishop Nersēs attends the liturgy. Later, in the same history she mourns the death of her unjustly killed husband by performing a pagan ritual:³⁹ “rending her garments and loosening her hair, she lamented with bosom bared among the mourners, she wailed aloud [and] made all weep by the mournful tears of her grievous lament.”⁴⁰ This way of lamenting over the dead will subsequently be condemned by St. Nersēs,⁴¹ but in this episode P^caranjem’s tantalising “performance” receives no critique and, in fact, has a great effect on King Aršak, who decides to take P^caranjem as his wife.

Up to this point, P^caranjem is scrutinised under the male gaze and is presented by the compiler as a desirable eroticised object for all the men who come into contact with her, and her behaviour, even while mourning, does not receive any negative comment or characterisation. Particular stress, laid on her physical beauty and ethical image, reveals two of the criteria which have an effect on the compiler’s evaluation of his female protagonists. The ensuing development of the narrative unsurprisingly, taking into account the Christian background of the compiler, underscores the importance of spiritual righteousness, and, though implicitly, points at the dangers of carnal desires. According to the compiler, P^caranjem herself sees the cause for her husband’s demise in her physical attractiveness: “Hear ye all, my husband’s death was because of me, my husband

³⁶ “Համբաւ գեղեցկութեան աղջկանն լնդ վայրոն սարածեցաւ, և Համբաւ գեղոյ նորս յաճախեալ բազմանայր և Հնչէր” (PBPH Դ:ԺԵ). However, as we shall see below, this inspiring depiction of the queen, as Garsoian, among others, mentions, “hardly suits the subsequent treatment of the queen” (EH p. 283).

³⁷ “Հօրեցօրորդին Գնելոյ” (PBPH Դ:ԺԵ), literally, “the son of the father’s brother.”

³⁸ “իբրև աեսանէր թէ կալան զայր իւր և կապեցին” (PBPH Դ:ԺԵ).

³⁹ A similar way of showing one’s grief occurs in the Old Testament as well: see, e.g., 2 Kings 19:1, Esth. 4:1, 1 Macc. 2:14.

⁴⁰ “Իսկ կինն սպանելոյն Փառանձեմն զՀանդեմսն պատառեալ, զգխս արձակեալ, մերկատիս ‘ի մէջ աշխարհնին կոծէր. ձայն արխանելով ճէր, յոլոս արտասուաց յաղիողոք գուժի առ Հասարակ զանենեսեան լաղուցանէր” (PBPH Դ:ԺԵ).

⁴¹ “Եթէ յանկարծ մեռանէր ոք, ոչ ոք իշխէր անուսութեածք արտաքոյ կարգի կանոնի եկեղեցւոյ լալ զժեռեալն” (PBPH Ե:ԽՍ); “And if anyone suddenly died no one dared weep hopelessly over the dead beyond the canonical regulations of the church, no one dared wail or lament over the dead” (EH V:xxxii).

was put to death because someone desired me!''⁴² Even though she has not done anything wrong, P'aranjem is “charged” with murder, an accusation reiterated later by King Aršak.⁴³

Another noteworthy point in this episode is that in distress P'aranjem rushes to *church* to appeal for help. The incentive behind such behaviour is not clear: this might be merely a literary means for the compiler to usher St. Nersēs out of the church so that the *kat'otikos* would admonish Aršak and pronounce the prophetic words about the end of Arsacid rule in Armenia;⁴⁴ or, perhaps, it indicates P'aranjem's adherence to Christian faith even though it contradicts with her subsequent description as someone who instructed her son to worship the pagan *dews*.⁴⁵ Another feasible explanation is that desperate P'aranjem turns to the holy man, for he is the only person who can show her compassion and protect her.

Several remarks should also be made about Aršak's marriage to P'aranjem. The compiler wants us to believe that Aršak fell in love with her the moment he saw her, which is why he married her. There is an additional explanation to this marriage, which lies in the realm of *awrēnk'*. From pre-Islamic Persian sources, extensively studied and systematised by Anait Perikhanian, we know about the legal and religious (Zoroastrian) obligations of the *tohm* (agnatic group) to provide for the continuation of the line of its members: should a man die without leaving an heir, the members of the agnatic group will ensure that a boy be born by the deceased man's widow or daughter so that he will manage the deceased man's property and preserve the domestic cult of his ancestors.⁴⁶ The textual evidence allows us to claim that this custom was also followed in Armenia, especially by the royal family, perhaps with some modifications.⁴⁷ Gnel was

⁴² “Լուարուք ամենեքեան, զի մաշ առն իմոյ վասն իմ եղեւ. զի որ ինձ ակն եղ վասն իմ, զայրն իմ եւս սպանանել” (PBPH Դ:ՃԵ). Similarly, in Agathangelos' *History* it is Hrip'simē's physical beauty that attracts first Diocletian (§§ 139-40, 155), and then King Trdat (§§ 165-6), but it is the spiritual purity (*cf.* § 194) that will eventually celebrate victory and be highly extolled by the author.

⁴³ See below, p. 13.

⁴⁴ “Ապա խօսել սկսանելք սուրբն Ներսէս, եւ ասէք. [...] կործանումն՝ որ բերանով մարզպրէին ածի ՚ի վերայ ձեր ընպէլ ազգիդ Արշակունեաց վետին բաժակն, արբեսջիք եւ կործանեսջիք, եւ այլ ծի եւս կանգնեսջիք” (PBPH Դ:ՃԵ); “Then St. Nersēs spoke out and said: [...] the destruction foretold by the mouth of the prophet shall come upon you: that your Aršakuni race drink the last cup. Ye shall drink it; ye shall be drunk and be destroyed, ye shall not rise again” (EH IV:xv).

⁴⁵ EH IV:xliv and V:xxii.

⁴⁶ Perikhanian, pp. 82-3.

⁴⁷ This custom had ancient roots and was also observed among Armenia's neighbouring cultures (*Ibid.* p. 94). Thus, it is not excluded that already the Proto-Armenians were

Aršak's nephew (his brother's son)⁴⁸ and belonged to the Arsacid dynasty. Because he died childless, Aršak, as the *tanutēr* of the Arsacid family, along with other agnates, was obliged to undertake the guardianship of P'arānjem and take care of Gnel's lineage. It is additionally supported by the fact that Tirit^c asks for Aršak's (and not anyone else's) permission to marry widowed P'arānjem.⁴⁹ Aršak's marriage to P'arānjem, therefore, corresponds to the Iranian *čakarīh* marriage, which, in its basic form prescribes that a widow marry a member of her husband's agnatic family to produce an heir for her deceased spouse.⁵⁰ The problem with this hypothesis might be that the future King Pap, who was born from this union, should have been the heir of Gnel and not of Aršak. And indeed he was, but because Aršak did not have other children, the Armenian throne passed to Pap, who stood next in succession to the throne as the heir of Gnel.⁵¹

As the story unfolds, the compiler once again puts the blame for Gnel's death on P'arānjem. Ironically enough, the accusations are pronounced by the instigator of the murder himself. Upon hearing Tirit^c's request to allow him to marry P'arānjem, Aršak says: "Gnel's death was [indeed] over his wife."⁵² By stressing the destructive power of female sexuality, the compiler attempts to exonerate the king: regardless of the fact that P'arānjem does not allure Tirit^c, who devises the plan of Gnel's murder, and that it is Aršak, who gives the final order, the core of the problem is presented to be P'arānjem's ability to arouse men's sexual desires.

In the ensuing events, the compiler's discourse reveals conspicuous hostility towards P'arānjem's figure. On many occasions she is described as *anawrēn* (անօրէն) — 'the one who disobeys *awrēnk*', rendered by

acquainted with it. Garsoian also discusses the problems concerning Aršak's marriages but does not offer a definitive conclusion. Our approach here differs from Garsoian's tentative suggestions that most likely the Armenian court exercised polygamy in the Iranian way (so Aršak was simultaneously married to P'arānjem and Olompi), or, "though less probably," that P'arānjem was given to Gnel according to one type of *čakarīh* marriage, i.e. in this case, when a member of an agnatic group "lends" his wife, under specific circumstances, to his next of kin (EH p. 285-6 n. 40). For more details about *čakarīh* marriage and its types, see Perikhanian, pp. 94-8.

⁴⁸ "Ելքօրորդին արքային" (PBPH Դ:Ճ).

⁴⁹ "Կամ լիցի, ասէ, քեզ արքայի, զի Հրաման տացես՝ զՓաստնձեմ կին Գնելոյ թող արից ինձ կնոթեան" (*Ibid*); "May it be," he said, 'your royal will, may you give the order allowing me to take Gnel's wife P'arānjem as my wife'" (EH IV:xv).

⁵⁰ Perikhanian, p. 94; for deviations from this model, see *ibid*. p. 97. See also n. 47.

⁵¹ For additional evidence, see n. 57.

⁵² EH IV:xv; "վասն կնոջն իւրոյ եղեւ մաշն Գնելոյ" (PBPH Դ:Ճ).

Garsoian as “iniquitous”⁵³ and “impious.”⁵⁴ The reason for such a change of attitude, in comparison with her first description, seems to be P’aranjem’s subversive agency, which she demonstrates after transition from a widow’s status to the position of the king’s wife. The “modest” maiden⁵⁵ transforms into an “iniquitous” P’aranjem, who rejects her new spouse’s, King Aršak’s, love by claiming that Aršak “is hairy of body and dark of color.”⁵⁶ This “disobedience” is one of the reasons for the compiler to chastise P’aranjem, and he presents it as a pretext for the king to seek for another wife in the land of Greeks,⁵⁷ from where they bring “a wife of the race of the imperial house” whose name is Ołompi (Olympias).⁵⁸ “P’aranjem nourish[es] a great jealousy and resentment against Ołompinay,”⁵⁹ which results in the latter’s death instigated by “the consummately evil

⁵³ EH IV:xv.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* V:xxii.

⁵⁵ The stereotype of a “docile” woman is continuously reinforced in the early Christian tradition, for instance, by referring to Paul in 1 Tim. 2:11-14 (see the epigraph of this article). John Chrysostom, whose works were very popular in early Christian Armenia, reiterates Paul’s words in *In Genesim Λόγος Δ'* in an attempt to justify male superiority over women as a result of the first sin: “Ἄλλ’ ὅτι μὲν ὑποτέτακται τῷ ἀνδρὶ, καὶ διὰ τὴν ἀμαρτίαν ὑπετάγῃ, δῆλον ἐντεῦθεν” (John Chrysostom. “In Genesim.” *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca* = PG 54, p. 595); “Ալլ զի [կինն] Հնազանդեաւ առն եւ յարազ մէզացն էր Հնազանդմինն յայտ յայսցանէ է” (John Chrysostom. *Čairk'*, p. 77); “But hence it is obvious that she is in submission to her husband, and the submission is due to the sin” (my translation).

⁵⁶ EH IV:xv; “թաւ է ձարմնով, և թուխ է գունով” (PBPH Դ:Ժ).

⁵⁷ Aršak’s search for a wife presumably happens when Pap is already born, which means that he has fulfilled his duty towards Gnel (cf. EH p. 286 n. 40, where Garsoian suggests that Pap was born not much later than 352, while Ołompi could not have been killed before Constantine’s death in 361).

⁵⁸ “Ապա իբրեւ կինն ‘ի նա ոչ յանգոյց զմիսս իւր, առաքեաց արքայն Արշակ յերկիրն Յունաց, եւ խնդրեաց էած անտի կին ‘ի կայսերական տունին ազգաւ, զի անուն էր նորա Ոլոմպի” (PBPH Դ:Ժ); “Then, when he could in no way win over his wife, King Aršak sent a request to the land of the Greeks and brought from there a wife from the race of the imperial house, whose name was Ołompi” (EH IV:xv). Aršak does not need to divorce to marry again: in many ancient traditions, including Zoroastrianism, polygamy was a common phenomenon, and a number of references in *The Epic Histories* hint at their presence among the nobility in Christian Armenia: see e.g. V:xvi; V:xxxii. This is one of numerous phenomena, such as incestuous, consanguineous marriages and concubinage, against which the efforts of religious leaders were directed (see, *inter alia*, EH IV:iv). On Aršak’s marriages and problems of chronology, see Garsoian’s view (EH pp. 285-6 n. 40).

⁵⁹ “Իսկ Փառանձեմն ‘ի մեծ նախանձու և ոխութեամբ գնայր ընդ Ողոմպինոյն, եւ խնդրէ սպանանել զնա զեղովք” (PBPH Դ:Ժ); “And so P’aranjem nursed her resentment against Ołompi and she planned to kill her” (EH IV:xv). In Garsoian’s translation the word *զեղովք* (instr., pl. of *զեղ* = medicine, poison) is missing, i.e. P’aranjem’s intention was to poison Ołompi.

P'aranjem.”⁶⁰ Based on the textual evidence, we are led to believe that the compiler's severe condemnation of P'aranjem's agency springs from nothing else but her explicit subversion of her husband's authority, which most probably contradicted the tenets of the customary law.

Furthermore, a close reading of the text discloses valuable information. In IV:xv the compiler writes: “But as much as King Aršak loved the woman, so much did the woman hate the king, saying: ‘He is hairy of body and dark of color’.”⁶¹ The parallel construction of this sentence (*որչափ...* նոյնչափ / as much as... so much) reveals an important asymmetry: ‘the king’ is juxtaposed not with ‘the queen’ but with ‘the woman’. In the context of the *čakarih* marriage between P'aranjem and Aršak, P'aranjem could not and was not called ‘queen.’ On the contrary, the compiler calls ‘queen’ the Greek Princess Ołompi, after she enters into a complete (*pātixšāih*) marriage with King Aršak.⁶² In IV.xviii the compiler calls P'aranjem “the king's wife,”⁶³ although at the time she is Aršak's only wife. Only after King Aršak is imprisoned and put in the fortress of Anhus⁶⁴ does the compiler call P'aranjem ‘queen’.⁶⁵ It is explained by the fact that P'aranjem was the former king's only remaining wife, and, most importantly, the mother of the future king. Yet, in episode IV:xv, in which the first negative characterisation of P'aranjem is found, she is merely a *čakar*-wife of Aršak and does not possess any legal authority.

⁶⁰ “[Մըջինիկ երեցն] Հստ չարեացն կատարելոց զՓառանձեմայն ամենայն չարեօք լցեալ զկանն կատարէր. Եւ յանօրէնն Փառանձեմայն պարզեւ առեալ չերիցուն զզիւզն՝ ուսաի իսկ ինքն էր ՚ի նաշանիքն Տարօն զաւալին, որուն անոն Գովկունք կոչին” (my highlighting) (PBPH Դ:ՃԵ); “Filled with evil, he [the priest Mrjiwinik] carried out the will of the consummately evil P'aranjem. And the false priest received as a gift from the iniquitous P'aranjem the village called Gomkunk', from which he came, in the province and district of Tarōn” (EH IV:xv). It is noteworthy that P'aranjem had the authority to grant lands, but what is not clear, and we would ascribe it to an interpolation, is the fact that Gomkunk' village in Tarōn province belonged neither to the royal family, nor to P'aranjem's father's family.

⁶¹ “Եւ որչափ սիրէր արքայն Արշակ զկինն, նոյնչափ ատեաց կինն զարքայն Արշակ. ասելով՝ թէ թաւ է մարմնով, և թուխ է զունով” (PBPH Դ:ՃԵ).

⁶² EH IV:xv. A *pātixšāih* marriage was legally the most complete form of marriage known in the Iranian world. It was different from the *čakarih* one, for it involved a bride who, after marriage, would leave the protection of her father's family and pass under the guardianship of her husband and his clan (Perikhianian, pp. 84-94), whereas during the *čakarih* marriage it was a widow marrying someone within her deceased husband's clan and only to produce an heir for her deceased husband.

⁶³ “կին թագաւորին” (PBPH Դ:ՃԲ).

⁶⁴ EH IV:liv.

⁶⁵ EH IV:lv. See also pp. 16-7.

P'arānjem's "evil nature" is further unveiled by the compiler elsewhere in *The Epic Histories*. In IV:xviii we come across a rancorous P'arānjem, who still holds a grudge against Vardan, the *tanutēr* of the Mamikonean house, because of his implication in Gnel's murder. She confirms to King Aršak Vasak Mamikonean's allegations against his elder brother that the latter is attempting to destroy the king and the Armenian realm; as a result, Vardan is perfidiously murdered. This incident shows that the king's wife had a certain involvement in political life of the court and could, to some degree, influence the decision-making process.

The assassinations of Ołompi and Vardan are ascribed to P'arānjem's "unrighteous" character. In particular in the case of Ołompi, the compiler attributes it to her covetousness and fear to lose her position in the court (which she actually never does till the end of her life), while for Vardan's murder he reveals that it is a retribution for Gnel's death. The fact that P'arānjem does not miss the opportunity to take revenge⁶⁶ indicates her enormous devotion and loyalty to her deceased husband, about which the compiler is remarkably silent. Had he been more sympathetic to P'arānjem, he would have, at least, made some attempt to moralise this aspect of her motives. But the subversion of male authority seems to have been considered a serious infringement, and nothing could serve as a mitigating circumstance.

The chastisement of P'arānjem is a recurrent theme of *The Epic Histories*, and is not limited only to her sexuality and vengefulness. She is considered to be the cause of the foul behaviour of her son, the future King Pap, depicted both in IV:xliv and V:xxii.⁶⁷ As the compiler claims, P'arānjem "consecrated him to the *dews* since she was an unrighteous person who had no fear of God,"⁶⁸ or as in V:xxii, "offered him up to the *dews*, and so he was filled with *dews* from childhood."⁶⁹ Notwithstanding the similarity of the two accounts, we find additional information about P'arānjem in IV:xliv, which is absent from V:xxii: when she is informed

⁶⁶ In Ołompi's case she does exactly what Aršak did to her, i.e. deprived her of his young spouse.

⁶⁷ It should be mentioned that most scholars agree that IV:xliv is an interpolation for it interrupts the enumeration of Armenian victories, and that its story belongs to Book V (*EH* p. 298), but the differences in the accounts, especially the wording, is worth studying.

⁶⁸ *EH* IV:xliv. "Եւ եղի իբրև ծնաւ զնա մայրն իւր. քանզի անօրէն մարդ էր և ամենելին յաստուծոյ ոչ երկնչէր, նուիրեաց զնա զիւաց" (my highlighting) (*PBPH* Դ:իս).

⁶⁹ "Ճօնեաց զնա զիւաց անօրէն մայրն Փառանձեմ, եւ վասն այնորիկ լի էր զիւօք ի տղայութենէ իւրնէ" (my highlighting) (*Ibid.* Ե:իր).

about her son's "sodomy,"⁷⁰ P'aranjem makes an attempt to stop him, but when she sees that her efforts are vain, she bewails her misfortune and says: "Woe is me, my son, for you are possessed and I knew it not!"⁷¹ Garsoian's explanation of this discrepancy is persuasive: she suggests that "[t]his tale is evidently derived from the confused and contradictory oral traditions that had clustered around the enigmatic figures of P'aranjem and Pap."⁷² The underlying assumption of these two stories is that the child's mother was in charge of his upbringing and, in particular, of religious education.⁷³ This, in its turn, means that women themselves received some kind of education which rendered them competent to instruct their children in religious matters.

The final reference to P'aranjem is found in IV:lv, where we observe an acting queen who is characterised, for the first time, as "the queen of the realm of Armenia, the wife of Aršak king of Armenia"⁷⁴ and who seems to possess great authority in the absence of a male leader. By commanding an army of eleven thousand men of noble origin,⁷⁵ she organises a ferocious opposition against the large army of the Persian king and protects the fortress of Artagers for about fourteen months. Although her deed might have been characterised as *k'aj* (*ρωλ*) — brave, valiant,⁷⁶ the

⁷⁰ EH IV:xliv. "զպոնկութիւն, զպզութիւն արուազիտութեան եւ զանասնազի-սոոթիւն" (PBPH Դ:լող).

⁷¹ EH IV:xliv. "Վայ ինձ, որդեակ իձ. զի քեզ տագնազ էր, և ես ոչ զիտիի" (PBPH Դ:լող).

⁷² EH p. 298.

⁷³ Pogossian has convincingly shown on the examples from Lazar P'arpec'i's and Elišē's works, that women, indeed, were closely involved in providing their children with a religious education in 5th and probably 6th century Armenia (Pogossian, "Women at the Beginning of Christianity in Armenia," pp. 373-5). Additionally, there is evidence that the military preparation of young noblemen, as part of their education, was entrusted to *dayeaks*. Garsoian mentions that the word *dayeak* finds its origin in Iranian **dāy* meaning "care, nurture," and relates to Pahlavi *dāyag*, that is "nurse, foster-mother, servant," as well as to Avestan *daēnu-*, which means "that which gives milk;" "foster-father, tutor." As far as the junior members of royal Arsacid family are concerned, the social institute of *dayekut'iwn* (զայեկութիւն) was a hereditary "prerogative of the Mamikonean house" (EH p. 521).

⁷⁴ EH IV:lv; "աիկին աշխարհին Հայոց կինն Արշակայ թագաւորին Հայոց Փառանձեմ" (PBPH Դ:ձէ). In the same episode the compiler stresses P'aranjem's queen's title several times.

⁷⁵ "ազասս ընտիրս սպառազէնս պատերազմողս" (my highlighting) (*Ibid.*); "select, armored, warlike *azats*" (EH IV:lv): *azat* — "[l]owest stratum of the Iranian and Armenian nobility in the early medieval period [...]. The *azats* in Armenia were the retainers of the magnates and formed the contingents of the noble cavalry (*azatagund*)" (EH p. 512).

⁷⁶ In classical Armenian historiography this adjective (and its derivative *k'ajut'iwn* — valour) was applied to describe primarily the male agency, because it was a quality "bestowed on them by the god Vərəbrayna (Arm. Vahagn)" (EH p. 535), a deity encompassing the ideals of masculinity. Women were not supposed to possess that sort of agency,

Queen and her actions do not receive any explicit positive evaluation by the compiler. After fourteen months of heroic defence of Artagers, the divine punishment (probably famine or some kind of epidemic) befalls those who are feasting in the fortress in P'arānjem's presence, sparing only her and two serving women. After that, she is "insulted" by the *hayr mardpet*⁷⁷ "as though she were a harlot,"⁷⁸ is reproached for all the sins and failures of the Arsacid dynasty, and is eventually abandoned. P'arānjem surrenders the fortress and is taken to Persia with other captives, where, by order of Šapuh, she is subjected "to foul and beastly copulation,"⁷⁹ thus causing her gruesome death at the hands of the mob. As the compiler informs us, by dishonouring the Queen, "Šapuh king of Persia wished to insult the race of the realm and kingdom of Armenia."⁸⁰ P'arānjem pays the most expensive price for taking on the male roles of a leader and of a protector of the realm: her dishonour and death are symbolic manifestations of dominance on behalf of Šapuh.⁸¹ It is noteworthy that the same Šapuh does not treat King Aršak in a similar disgraceful manner, even though Aršak had caused much more trouble to the Persians. An episode in chapter IV:lviii sheds some light on this problem for it underscores the importance that Šapuh attached to Armenian women of influential noble families:

and whenever it happened, it was usually attributed to a divine intervention like in the stories of women martyrs (see e.g. Agathangelos, §876: "Իսկ նա [արքայն Տրդատ] կաց պատմաց առաջի կալսերն [...] գշաճրերութիւն նաշատակեալ վկայիցն [Հոփափաթեանց] քաջութեան"; "Then he [king Trdat] stood before the emperor and told him [...] about the heroic endurance of the brave martyrs [of Hrip'simēt]"). For the full implications of the epithet *k'aj*, see Garsoian, "The Iranian Substratum", pp. 157-9.

⁷⁷ The role of the *hayr mardpet* in the Armenian court is not quite clear, except for the fact that he possessed a very high rank, which, presumably, would allow him to treat the queen with disrespect. For more details and references, see EH p. 542-3.

⁷⁸ "թշնամանեաց զափիինն մեծասիւ իրիւ զբող մի" (PBPH Դ:Ճ). Most likely it was a verbal abuse and not a sexual one for the compiler mentions that the *hayr mardpet* was a eunuch (ներթին).

⁷⁹ EH IV:lv; "Հրամայեաց արձակել արկնոյն Փառանձեամայ ՚ի խառնակութիւն պոռնկութեանն անասնական պղծութեանն" (PBPH Դ:Ճ).

⁸⁰ EH IV:lv; "կամեցաւ թագաւորն Պարսից Շապուհ թշնամանս առնել ազգին աշխարհին Հայոց եւ թագաւորութեանն" (PBPH Դ:Ճ).

⁸¹ Šapuh treats other Armenian noblewomen in a similar way: "Եւ Հրաման տայր Հոլանել զամենայն ազատ կանանին, եւ նստուցանել աստի անտի ասպարիսին. եւ ինքն Շապուհ արքայ Հեծեալ ՚ի ձի, շատկի անյանէր առ կանանոյն. եւ որ յակին զային, մի մի ՚ի նոցանէ պղծեալ ՚ի խառնակութիւն տանէր առ ինքն" (PBPH Դ:Ճ); "And he ordered all these noblewomen stripped naked and seated here and there on the race-course. And King Šapuh himself rode out on horseback, galloped among the women, and took for himself one by one whichever of them caught his eye for foul copulation" (EH IV:lviii).

Šapuh king of Persia likewise ordered fortresses built in the most impregnable localities of Armenia and he also ordered keepers installed there. And he apportioned the noblewomen among these fortresses and there, so that if their husbands did not come to serve him, the keeper-of-the-fortresses should kill the wives left with them.⁸²

We are inclined to believe that Šapuh would opt for the most effective way to coerce Armenian noblemen into submission to his authority, and for that reason he chose a target they would most robustly defend. The disgrace of one's wife would mean absolute disgrace of her husband: dishonouring the queen meant showing total disrespect to the country and its people. Maybe this is the reason why P'arānjem's role in Armenian history is even more downplayed and obscured by other historians, and the details of her death are changed.⁸³

The compiler's attitude to and representation of Queen P'arānjem is ambivalent and complicated, as the many inconsistencies of the narrative make clear. It can mainly be attributed to the uniqueness of P'arānjem's character in Armenian history, which does not fully correspond to any stereotype with which the cleric is acquainted. She is lauded for her beauty and modesty and is sharply rebuked for her vindictiveness, impiety and disobedience to her husband. Once she was characterised as *anawrēn*, her reputation seems to have been irretrievably lost, and even her valiant deed could not restore it. The negative evaluation of P'arānjem's actions is not solely based on the gender factor, for malevolence and sinfulness of men is also openly criticised, and the adjective *anawrēn* is used to characterise, for instance, the traitor Databē,⁸⁴ the "evil" *hayr-mardpet*,⁸⁵ as well as the apostates Vahan Mamikonean and Meružan Arcruni.⁸⁶ Only P'arānjem's rejection of the king's love seems to indicate an overt subversion of patriarchal authority and breach of the *awrēnk'*. It should be assumed that under *awrēnk'*, as interpreted by the Christian cleric, wives were expected to fully obey their husbands.

⁸² “Եւ տայր Հրաման Շապուշ արքայն Պարսից զամուր ամուր տեղիսն Հայոց բերդս ծինել, Հրամայեաց եւ բերդակալս կաղուցանել: Եւ զազատ կանանին անդէն՝ ի բերդեանն բաշխէր եւ թողոյր. զի եթէ ոչ արք նոցա եկեսգեն նմա՝ ի ծառայութիւն, սպանցեն զկանայս նոցա բերդակալքն՝ առ որս եթող զնոսա”(*PBPH* Դ:ծը).

⁸³ Xorenac'i, for instance, at first refers to her as "a certain P'arānjem" ("զՓառանձեմ ոմն") (III:22), and although he mentions her murdering Olompi because of her jealousy (III:24), he says nothing about P'arānjem's leadership and long-lasting defence of Artagers (III:35). Finally, in the same chapter, her death is described as being caused by the Persians who impaled her body on a cart pole, and no mention of rape is made.

⁸⁴ *EH* III.viii.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* III.xviii.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* IV.l ix.

The story of the defence of Artagers, which features P'aranjem as the commander of the army of eleven thousand noble men, is probably the most revealing episode of *The Epic Histories* as far as women are concerned. In the absence of the king and *sparapet* (the commander-in-chief of the army) the queen undertakes the difficult task of protecting the land against the aggressors, which is a unique case in the history of ancient Armenia. Was this agency prompted by the *awrēnk'* of Arsacid Armenia? Or, was it P'aranjem's strong personality that assisted her in mustering and commanding the army? An episode in Agathangelos's *History* sheds some light on this, and it points to a certain legitimacy of P'aranjem's rule: Queen Ašxēn participates in giving commands to the army, albeit together with her husband, King Trdat and his sister Xosroviduxt. In fact, Trdat is mentioned first, which shows who is actually in charge, yet it is remarkable that the queen and the king's sister share this agency with the king.⁸⁷ Perhaps, this is the reason why the compiler does not stigmatise this deed of P'aranjem as *anawrēn*, even though the campaign eventually failed. Instead, he solemnly, with some respect, acknowledges her rank of the Queen of the realm of Armenia, emphasising her important position in the Armenian kingdom. Furthermore, he describes her tribulations and horrible demise at the enemy's hands with great sympathy. It must have been her high rank that delegated her authority over the representatives of the nobility, which indicates that the *awrēnk'* did not deprive women, or at least the queen, of agency outside the confines of their household or estate. On the contrary, if men were absent, the burden of their responsibilities would fall to women.

4.2. *Hamazpuhi Mamikonean*

The story of the second important female character, Hamazpuhi Mamikonean, is found at the end of *Book IV* in chapter lix, the title of which, however, does not include her name.⁸⁸ In comparison with P'aranjem, reference to Hamazspuhi occupies little space in the narration and is less

⁸⁷ “Իսկ թագաւորն Տրդատիս Հանգերձ ծիաբանութեամբ կնաւ իւրով Աշխեն տիկնաւ, եւ քերր իւրով իւսորովիցիսսով, Հրաման եւս ‘ի ժողով կոչել ծիաբանութեամբ ամենայն զօրաց իւրոց’; ‘Then king Tiridates, with his wife, queen Ashkhēn, and his sister Khosrovidukht, ordered a gathering to be summoned of all his army’ (Agathangelos, §791).

⁸⁸ As mentioned by Garsoian (*EH* p. 16), the headings of the chapters throughout the text, along with the *Table of Contents*, were presumably added in the Bagratid period, when the practice became common; the reason(s) for avoiding to mention Hamazspuhi's name is a matter of another interesting discussion.

equivocal: she is a martyr who chooses to die for her faith rather than accept the religion of the Mazdeans. Her martyrdom was one among many that took place at the time when the apostates Vahan Mamikonean and Meružan Arcruni “gave out an order to the fortresses to compel the women to turn to the religion of the Mazdeans, and if they did not accept, to put all of them cruelly to death.”⁸⁹ Writing in the Mamikonean milieu, it is no wonder that in this case the compiler’s choice falls on Hamazaspui.

Hamazaspui’s death is described in beautiful poetic language full of various stylistic devices which create the radiant image of a Christian martyr:

Since Hamazaspui would not agree to keep the Mazdean laws, they carried her to a lofty tower that stood on a rocky height and looked in the direction of the lake on the side of the river, stripped her naked as she had come from her mother’s [womb], tied her feet with a rope, and hanged her head down from that high place. And thus she died on the gallows. But her body was white and luminous to see, so that it remained hanging like a marvellous apparition. Her body shone from on high with a whiteness like snow, and day after day many people gathered to see it as a miraculous manifestation in the realm.⁹⁰

This fascinating account in the hagiographic genre does not have, to the best of our knowledge, an antecedent in the early Christian tradition.⁹¹ Hamazaspui follows one of the well-trodden routes towards martyrdom by refusing to abandon her faith: she is tortured and subjected to an awful death, and her bones are perceived as relics, while the details of her martyrdom are preserved in the communal memory.⁹²

⁸⁹ *EH* IV:lix; “զանձնայն կանար վախուցելոցն զնախարացին՝ որ թողինն և գնացինն, տային Հրաման՝ ի բերդանն զի ներեսցեն զնոսա՝ զարձուցանել յօրին Մաղղեզան. Եթէ ոչ առնվտուն յանձն, սասակեսցեն զամենեսեան շարաչար” (PBRH Դ:ծթ).

⁹⁰ *EH* IV:lix; “Իբրի ոչ առնոյր յանձն Համազապուշի պաշել զօրէնս Մաղղեզանզն, Հանէին՝ ի բարձր աշամարգի՝ որ կայր՝ ի վերայ բարձր զաշուն քարին, որ Հային՝ ի կորմն ծովակին՝ ի գետոյ կուսէ. և մերկացուցին զնա իբրև՝ ի նօրէ. և արկեալ կապ զոտիցն, զվիվայր կախեցին զնա զարձուէն կուսէ. և այնպէ մեսու ի կախազանին: Եւ էր նա սպիսակ մարմնով, և պայծառ տեսանելովն. կայր կախեալ յերկոյթ տեսիլ նշանակի, և փաղփաղիք մարմինն՝ ի բարձուէն զոր օրինակ ձիւն սպիսակութեամբն. և բազում մարդիկ ժողովէին տեսանել օր բաս օրէ, զի իբրև սքանչելի ինչ երկը յաշարչին” (PBRH Դ:ծթ).

⁹¹ There are several accounts of this genre in *The Epic Histories*, and, as Garsoian observes, some of them “may provide the earliest attestations to date of tales soon to become familiar to the entire Christian community,” because they are not found in any other known source (*EH* p. 28).

⁹² As early antecedents of a similar self-sacrifice, which must have been well known to the audience of *The Epic Histories*, were, among many others, the martyrdom of Polycarp attested by Eusebius in his *Church History* (IV.xv:1-43) and of the Hrip’simian virgins preserved by Agathangelos (§§137-258). The latter account along with the martyrdom of St. Vardan and his companions, as Garsoian rightly mentions, “became the rôle models

Hamazaspuci is presented as a paragon of virtue and of true self-denying belief in Christian ideals, which should be emulated. Although her agency appears as subversive to her persecutors, Hamazaspuci's defiance is lauded by the compiler, for it is a strong indication of her adherence to the ancestral law. In the context of the great rebellion of 451 and the continuing religious pressure exerted by Sassanid Persia, which resulted in the peace agreement of Nuarsak in 484, it becomes understandable that such behaviour of a "fragile" woman should be extolled by the fifth-century cleric. Although the fourth-century Roman Empire was witnessing "[t]he demise of martyrdom as a way to manifest one's Christian commitment,"⁹³ for the Armenian clergy martyrdom was still a very powerful and indispensable concept deployed to rouse people to defend their faith against the aggressor.

Concerning the use of female martyrs in the early Christian narrations, Clark argues that the Church Fathers extensively used "the rhetoric of shame" in an attempt "to construct a gendered disciplinary apparatus,"⁹⁴ which was usually achieved, paradoxically, through urging "both sexes to become more 'manly' through the adoption of a 'feminine' standard of conduct."⁹⁵ John Chrysostom, for instance, wrote, "So what would men say in their defence for their weakness, what is their excuse, when women show manly behaviour?"⁹⁶ The antithesis is used to "rouse" the male recipient of the text to act in a more manly way as compared to "inferior" women.

However, the model used in *The Epic Histories* is different. Indeed, in the context of religious persecutions in the second half of the 5th century, when the stories were collected in the Mamikonean milieu, the inclusion of Hamazaspuci's martyrdom was aimed at creating a female role model who would belong to Mamikonean dynasty and would serve as an inspiration to the female audience. But the compiler does not use "the rhetoric of shame" and does not "construct a gendered disciplinary apparatus": it is all about "righteousness" and "unrighteousness," reverence of "hay-*reni astvacatur awrēnk*" and veneration of martyrs who died for it.

par excellence, and the martyrdom became the touchstone dividing the pious, virtuous and valiant from the impious and base coward" ("Reality and Myth" pp. 128-9).

⁹³ Clark, *Women* p. 115.

⁹⁴ Clark, "1990 Presidential Address" p. 221.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 222.

⁹⁶ My translation. "Τίς οὖν ἀν γένοιτο λοιπὸν ἀνδράσι μαλακιζομένοις ἀπολογία, τίς δὲ συγγνόμη, ὅταν γυναῖκες ἀνδρίζονται" ("De Sancta Droside Martyre," PG 50, p. 688). The classical Armenian text was, unfortunately, unavailable to us.

4.3 *Zarmanduxt*

The last female character that appears more than once in *The Epic Histories* is the Queen of Armenia, the daughter-in-law of P'arānjem, the wife of King Pap — Zarmanduxt. According to the account of the compiler, after the death of King Pap and the expulsion of the Greek protégé King Varazdat, the *sparapet* Manuēl Mamikonean undertakes the role of *dayeak* for Zarmanduxt's underage sons Aršak and Vałaršak.⁹⁷ Zarmanduxt is depicted as possessing compliant agency, for all her actions are manipulated by the *sparapet*, and she passively consents to perform his will. By a detailed account of *sparapet*'s every deed, the audience are made to believe that the *sparapet* Manuēl Mamikonean is the main protagonist of subsequent events, for he gives “orders to the realm in the place of the king” and leads the nation “with great wisdom and great success.”⁹⁸

There is, however, some evidence in the text that prompts reconsideration of the image that the compiler strives to create. In the same episode we learn that *sparapet* Manuēl honours Zarmanduxt as the Queen⁹⁹ and takes counsel with her when an important decision concerning the future of the country is to be made.¹⁰⁰ Afterwards, Zarmanduxt and Manuēl, together, send delegates to the Persian king to accept his lordship and seek reconciliation.¹⁰¹ As a result, Zarmanduxt receives “a crown, a

⁹⁷ *EH* V:xxxvii. For the role that a *dayeak* played, see n. 68.

⁹⁸ “Եւ սպարապէտն զօրավարն Հայոց Մանուէլն նուաճեաց զաշխարհս, եւ զամենայն մէծամեծն եւ նախարարն Հայոց առ ինքն ժողովէր, եւ էր նա աաջնորդ եւ զբոխ նոցա. եւ վարէր զիր իշխանութիւնն, եւ տայր Հրաման աշխարհի փոխանակ թագաւորի [...] Մէծավ ինաստոթեամբ եւ բազուդ Հաջողութեամբ աշխարհն Հայոց մէծապէտ առաջնորդէր [...]” (*PBPH* Ե:լէ). “And the *sparapet* and commander-in-chief Manuēl conquered the realm. He gathered around himself all the Armenian magnates and *naxarars* and made himself their leader and head. He wielded authority and gave orders to the realm in the place of the king [...] He guided the realm of Armenia with great wisdom and great success [...]” (*EH* V:xxxvii).

⁹⁹ “զՂարմանզուխս ‘ի մէծի չքի սիկնութեան պատուիր” (*PBPH* Ե:լէ); “he [Manuēl] honoured [...] Zarmanduxt with the great pomp of a queen” (*EH* V:xxxvii).

¹⁰⁰ “Բայց յորժամ տեսանէր Մանուէլն զոր ինչ գործեացի ընդէմ էր Հրամանաց թագաւորին Յունաց, ածեալ զմաս իւրով” թէ արժան է նմա գէթ զմի ոք թիկունս առնել նմա, ապա իսրէցեան խորհուրդ ընդ ամիկնցն, եւ կանեցաւ թիկունս առնել զարքայն Յունաց” [‘Յունաց’ does not fit the context: instead it should be “Պարսից”] (*PBPH* Ե:լէ); “But when Manuēl saw that whatever he did ran counter to the orders of the king of the Greeks, he judged it fitting to find one person at least to give him support. He then took council with the queen and they decided to seek the support of the Persian king” (*EH* V:xxxvii).

¹⁰¹ “Ապա յետ այսորիկ առաքեցին Զարմանզուխս ամիկնն Հայոց եւ սպարապէտն Մանուէլ զԳարշոյլ Մաղիսազ, եւ ընդ նմա զբազումն ի նախարարացն Հայոց, զովարսափօք ընձայիւք եւ պատարազօք առ թագաւորն Պարսից, զի ‘ի նա ձեռա տայցեն եւ զնա պաշտիցն,

robe-of-honour, and the royal standard”¹⁰² from the Persian king, and she is displayed “all around in place of the king.”¹⁰³ These events show that Queen Zarmanduxt, in fact, wields substantial authority in the Armenian realm and that the most powerful figure of the time, the commander-in-chief of the army, has to consider her opinion and obtain her consent before making crucial decisions. Like P’arānjem, Zarmanduxt leads the country in the absence of the king, although her role is largely downplayed by the compiler.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis of the representation of women in *The Epic Histories* shows that we deal with ‘moralizing’ stories reflecting a male-centred perspective of the upper-class Armenian nobility. This is why it is not surprising that we plunge into a male-dominated world in which women are almost invisible. It would be inaccurate to attribute it to the compiler’s misogyny or deliberate intention to obliterate women, for he writes about “global” events that concern the entire realm, such as war, diplomacy, revolt, succession, and, due to the patriarchal nature of the *naxarar* system, only men are the protagonists in these events: women’s agency, which is confined to their estates and households, lies outside the scope of the compiler’s work. The women that eventually appear in *The Epic Histories* primarily belong to the upper class, and their representation aims at buttressing the social norms of conduct which the patriarchal society considers “righteous”; at the same time, whosoever does not comply with these norms is condemned as *anawrēn*.

The compiler’s account suggests a subordinate status of women as compared to men of the same social rank in Arsacid Armenia: women’s

եւ նմա միամտութեամբ ծառայեսցեն, եւ սայցեն նմա զաշխարհս Հայոց” (PBPH b:լլ); “After this, Queen Zarmanduxt and the *sparapet* Manuēl sent Garjoyl *matxaz* with many Armenian *naxarars* as well as letters-patent, gifts, and presents to the king of Persia [to say] that they would give him their hand, submit to him, serve him faithfully, and hand the Armenian realm over to him” (EH V:xxxviii).

¹⁰² “Եւ Ետ թագաւորն Պարսից սանել՝ ի ձեռն Սուրենայ թագ եւ պատմուան, եւ զիան թագաւորացն աիկոնյն Զարմանղիսաոյ …” (PBPH b:լլ); “The king of Persia also sent a crown, a robe-of-honor, and the royal standard to Queen Zarmanduxt through the Suren[...].” (EH V:xxxviii).

¹⁰³ “Եւ յայնձ Հետ զօրավարն Հայոց Մանուէլ Հանկերձ ամենայն զնդաւն զափկին Զարմանղուս զիին թագաւորին Պապայ ՚ի զլուխ առեալ, ՚ի տեղի թագաւորացն ըրջեցուցանէին” (PBPH b:լլ); “And thereafter, the Armenian commander-in-chief Manuēl together with his entire contingent placed at their head Queen Zarmanduxt the wife of King Pap, and they displayed her all around in place of the king” (EH V:xxxviii).

absence from the main political discourse, their lack of voice and independent identity¹⁰⁴ are conducive to obtaining such an impression. Gender is, thus, an important factor for the compiler's evaluations. It points at specific roles and modes of behaviour that are appropriate for women of noble origin in accordance with the god-given ancestral *awrēnk'*. A virtuous noblewoman should be modest, beautiful, compassionate, forgiving, obedient to her husband, pious and a good mother who will provide her children with proper religious (Christian) education.

Women are the objects of men's gaze and the locus of manifestation of masculine superiority: we see it in the eroticised description of the female body which makes them the object of desire, as in the case of King Aršak observing “*մերկատիս*” (“with bosom bared”) P'aranjem mourning the death of her husband;¹⁰⁵ or, in IV:lv, the same P'aranjem is “punished” by men and is subjected to sexual abuse which causes her death. They are also used as an instrument by the enemy to control their husbands (IV:lviii).

Nevertheless, women manage to enter the male-dominated sphere of activity as influential agents. P'aranjem's and Zarmanduxt's political power, both acquired as a result of their husbands' demise and the absence of an adult son, shows that it was not against *awrēnk'* to see a woman lead the country, and that the office of the queen was highly esteemed and influential in Arsacid Armenia. Another sign of respect to Armenian noble-women is found in the episodes when the compiler refers to P'aranjem, Hamazaspui and Zarmanduxt as “lady” — *tikin* (*տիկին*),¹⁰⁶ which was the honourable title of the Zoroastrian deity Anāhitā in Armenian.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Woman's identity was defined in relation to the male figure under whose guardianship they lived: for instance, Hamazaspui is first introduced as a half-sister of Vahan Mamikonean, “the sister of Vardan and wife of Garegin, lord of the district of R̄stunik” (*EH* IV:lix); “*իսկ Վահանայ էր քոյրաթիւ ՚ի մամկոնեան տուծէն, քոյր Վարդանայ, Համազապուշի. և էր նա կին Գարեգնի տեառն Ռշտումեաց զաւառին*” (*PBPH* Դ:Ճթ). However, it should be mentioned that the same designation was applied to the young male members of the house, whereas the adult men are primarily presented in *The Epic Histories* with their title (e.g. Xosrov king of Armenia in III:vi; *sparapet* Vač'ē, the commander-in-chief of Greater Armenia in III:xi), or the name of the *naxarar* family they belong to (Meružan Arcruni in V:xxiii), and/or, to avoid a confusion in the case of the same name, the father's and/or brother's name could also be mentioned (Bishop Grigoris the son of Vrt'anēs and the brother of Yusik (III:vi)), and so forth.

¹⁰⁵ *EH* IV:xv.

¹⁰⁶ See, e.g., notes 34, 69, 94 and 96-8. When applied to P'aranjem and Zarmanduxt, Garsoian has in some cases translated it with the word ‘queen’. For more details on the use of the title *tikin*, see *EH* pp. 564-5.

¹⁰⁷ See, e.g., Agathangelos, §§53, 59.

There is no doubt that in Christian Armenia the title *tikin* preserved its positive connotation, for in IV:x we find St. Thecla, one of the most revered Christian martyrs in Armenia, referred to as “holy lady [*tikin*] T'ekl.”¹⁰⁸

On the basis of this evidence only, it would be fallacious to generalise and claim that all women occupied a dignified position in various layers of society, especially when we possess so much evidence about female subordination. However, other early Armenian sources also provide similar examples of noble women, not necessarily queens, actively participating and influencing social processes in the 4th and 5th century Arsacid Armenian kingdom.¹⁰⁹ It was a men’s world where women were esteemed and glorified if they complied with the roles defined by the customary law. Therefore, in order to create a complete image of early medieval Armenian society, it is of utmost importance to conduct further research into women’s representation in early Armenian art and literature, for as it appears from our analysis women’s role was largely downplayed in the dominant male discourse.

¹⁰⁸ “Երբեւ զնացեալ զայր օթեւանս երկուս, զիա եզեւ նոցա դիպել այլ քաղաքի միոջ. Եւ արտաքոյ քաղաքին վկայանց մի սուրբ ափենոցն թեկլի” (Ք:Ժ); “When they travelled for two stages, they happened to chance on another city at the martyrium of the holy lady T'ekl [which lay] outside the city” (EH IV:x). For a detailed study of this episode, see Calzolari, “De Sainte Thècle à Anahit” (1997).

¹⁰⁹ See, e.g., Pogossian, “Women at the Beginning of Christianity in Armenia,” pp. 355-80, and in particular the conclusion pp. 379-80.

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